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# AMERICA'S DUTY TO AMERICANS IN TURKEY.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE HON. JOHN SHERMAN,  
UNITED STATES SENATOR FROM OHIO.

BY THE REV. CYRUS HAMLIN, D.D., FOUNDER OF ROBERT  
COLLEGE, CONSTANTINOPLE.

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TO THE HON. JOHN SHERMAN—

DEAR SIR: Your illustrious name and illustrious services to the country give great weight to every utterance of your deliberate opinions. With regard to the imperilled missionaries in Turkey, you have said: "If our citizens go to a far distant country, semi-civilized and bitterly opposed to their movements, we cannot follow them there and protect them. Any act of war by us would be accompanied not only by the murder of the missionaries, but of their converts or sympathizers."

Being myself one of the missionaries implicated, and having members of my family—children and grandchildren—still residing in the Empire, having been connected with the Turkish work since 1837, and having resided thirty-five years in the Empire, and being now past the meridian of my eighty-sixth year, will you consider it presumption in me to correct, from my own experience and knowledge, some of the errors into which, from want of intimate knowledge, you have inadvertently fallen?

And, first of all, I did not go into "a country semi-civilized and *bitterly opposed to our movements*," but into a country well known and thoroughly explored, and having many aspects extremely favorable and inviting to missionary effort. Messrs. Fisk and Parsons, in 1820, explored the country of the Seven Churches. Messrs. Fisk and King ascended the Nile in 1823. And before 1827 the missionaries Parsons, Fisk, King, Bird, Goodell, and Smith had explored Palestine and Syria and carefully reported

the condition of those countries as calling loudly for Christian missions. In 1827 Mr. Gridley travelled from Smyrna to Cappadocia, in Asia Minor, and reported the condition of the country. In 1830 Messrs. Smith and Dwight made a long and careful tour of research, extending from Constantinople through Asia Minor and parts of Mesopotamia, Russia, and Persia. Their report, published in two volumes,\* declared the Empire open to Christian missions; not to the Moslems, but to the old and decayed Christian churches, Armenians, Greeks, Nestorians, and others.

Missions had long been established by Roman Catholics, and opposition might be apprehended from them, of course. The land journey of 2,400 miles had been made in safety, as had all the journeys above referred to. No opposition was made by the Turkish government, and none was apprehended in the establishment of missions; and, for more than half a century, none was experienced.

In the meantime, reforms were going forward. The great Sultan, Mahmoud, had broken with the past, had destroyed the Janizaries, and had openly declared that the welfare of his Empire depended upon cultivating right relations with Christian powers and with the Christian subjects of his Empire. He was especially friendly to Americans. When his old-fashioned Turkish fleet was destroyed at Navarino, he employed American naval architects, Eckford and Rhodes, to build a far better one. He treated them with distinguished consideration and personal regard.

When the young Sultan, Abdul Medjid, wished to promote the cultivation of cotton in his empire, having doubtless an eye to the more profitable use of the many useless slaves, he applied to the United States government for aid. The result was that Dr. Davis, of South Carolina, was sent with a few slaves and a model cotton plantation was established at San Stefano. The enterprise failed through no fault of Dr. Davis, who was decorated and handsomely rewarded. A much wiser and more successful scheme was the development of the mining resources of the empire. Again Abdul Medjid, applied to our government, and Prof. J. Lawrence Smith, a gentleman of great scientific attainments and of special skill in chemistry, an author and inventor, accepted an

\* New York, Jonathan Leavitt, 182 Broadway, 1833.

appointment. He made many valuable discoveries, one of which, an emery mine, is of value to the government to this day. When he presented Morse's telegraph to the Sultan, I was invited to assist him. The Sultan said to me, "I hope you find your residence at my capital a pleasant one," and he added many other kind things. After two trials of the telegraph in his palace, he sent to Professor Morse his first foreign decoration, with a framed diploma, in excellent Arabic, addressed to him as "The most learned of the Disciples of Jesus." Americans were specially honored.

In 1830 a treaty was formed between the United States and the Sublime Porte in which was the "most favored nation" article; and as Roman Catholic missionaries had been there for more than a century under the protection of the government and especially patronized by France, our missionaries entered unchallenged and asking for no favor not already accorded to others.

When the great Mahmoud died in 1839, his son Abdul Medjid ascended the throne and immediately issued the historic paper called the Hatti Sherif of Gul-hané, as a new constitution for the administration of his power. Under that, missionaries had all the rights and privileges they could ask or wish. They came and went freely; schools were established; the Bible was translated and printed in all the languages of the Empire, and freely sold.

In 1846, the Sultan authorized the formation of Protestant Armenian churches, although there was an earnest opposition from Roman Catholic and Russian sources. In 1847 he reinforced the permit by a Vizierial order and in 1850 by an imperial firman. The work of the American missionaries thus received the highest sanction of the supreme authority of the Empire. You were under a grave misapprehension of facts when you intimated that we went into "a country semi-civilized and *bitterly opposed to our movements.*" Of course, Roman Catholics and Russians were not friendly to us: but they were not "the country"!

The history of our educational "movements" proves further your great misapprehension of our position as missionaries. In 1840 I opened the Seminary, or Normal School, at Bebek, on the Bosphorus. It continued there prosperously for more than twenty years. When, afterwards, I wanted to establish Robert College, and the combined and powerful opposition of the Russian and

French diplomats prevented my building, I opened the college in the buildings of the Bebek Seminary—that institution having been transferred to Marsovan. The government absolutely refused to disturb me there.\* The seven years' restriction upon building was caused wholly by French and Russian interference. The visit of Admiral Farragut changed the tone of things, and leave was magnificently given. Since then seven other colleges have been established, under the authority chiefly of Abdul Aziz, the predecessor of the present Sultan Hamid.

More than forty seminaries or normal schools and young women's boarding schools have also had the full approbation of government. Many unmarried ladies have been teachers in these schools, and have safely gone back and forth into the distant interior, under the protection of the Turkish government. I plead, therefore, not guilty to the charge of entering a semi-civilized country bitterly opposed to us and leaving members of my family there where our government is under no obligation to secure the rights of American citizens. On the contrary, it was an exceptionally safe and inviting field of labor. More than 400 missionaries, men and women, have given their lives to that work during the past 75 years, and many are buried in Turkish soil.

Another point in your utterance is worthy of remark: "Any act of war would be accompanied not only by the murder of the missionaries, but of their converts and sympathizers."

By "an act of war" you evidently mean the shedding of blood. But when, in all this century, has this been necessary, or been resorted to, in defending the rights of foreigners in Turkey? All the nations of Europe protect their citizens in that Empire without any such "act of war"! They have often made a show of war, by ordering up a war ship, or ships of some kind; and this has always been sufficient. Many years ago, England had a case against Athens which was not attended to; and she sent some of her warships to close the Piræus; and the affair was immediately settled. England sent two of her warships into the Gulf of Smyrna to settle a local dispute between English and Turkish interests. The Turks immediately took the English view of the case, and there was no further trouble. Turkey has many exposed points, such as Smyrna, Mersin, Alexandretta, Crete above all; and she would do almost anything rather than have any one of

\* See "My Life and Times," 433-437.

these ports occupied by foreign war vessels with a demand. She keeps her own navy up at anchor in the farthest practicable interior of the Golden Horn, where alone her ships can rest and rust in safety.

Had our country defended the treaty rights of her citizens, as all the nations of Europe have defended theirs, the massacres that blot with innocent blood the last pages of the century would never have been perpetrated, as I shall briefly show.

The present Sultan, Hamid, came to the throne with an inveterate dislike to all Armenians who would not apostatize and thus follow his mother's example. He began his career by displacing them from office. Many hundreds of them were in various offices of government. He next began to oppress their schools with new and vexatious requirements and to spoil their school books by an absurd censorship. Many schools were closed, many school-books destroyed for containing forbidden words, such as "courage," "patience," "patriotism," "progress." In this work he encountered our schools, school-books, and teachers, and began cautiously his war upon them. He has destroyed our school-books printed and issued by the authority of his government and owned by Americans, an invasion of rights perpetrated upon Americans alone. Our government was often appealed to for redress, which was generally promised in the sweetest and most gracious words, of which our diplomats have been very proud. But no penalty was ever exacted, no promise was ever fulfilled, excepting the case of Mr. Bartlett's house, in which the moving force was the threat of an ironclad. Now every outrage thus treated during the last few years has been a distinct permission to go on to greater outrages upon property and personal rights. The Sultan has seen that it is a safe thing to perpetrate every indignity upon Americans and their property, until now the destruction of American property has amounted to nearly \$200,000. Not one dollar would have been destroyed had our government from the beginning protected our rights as all the governments of Europe protect their citizens.

It must be remembered that the destruction and the looting of the buildings at Harpoot, Marash, and other places were done in the presence of government officials and troops, and the plea "done by a mob" cannot be accepted.

It must also be remembered that every building destroyed had

been built in strict accordance with all the laws of building; their plans, measurements and proposed uses had all been laid before the proper authorities and received their sanctions. The government in destroying such buildings and looting them of all their contents of furniture, food and clothing has gone back upon itself in its eagerness to show "its contempt of America and Americans." In all this the Sultan is backed up by Russia. No indemnity has been exacted, or if any demand has been made it is understood that some high Russian diplomat whispers that now is not the proper time to enforce it, and it is dropped. Thus the "Great Republic" is justly the derision of other nations and cowers before a poor Sultan who cannot pay a piastre of his public debt, nor make the smallest loan in the money markets of Europe.

No Turk has yet been punished for robbery, pillage, murder, rape, rapine, torture unto death of women and children, and the horrid work still goes on. Why should it not? The nations, our own nation especially, have for two years been giving the Sultan *carte-blanche* to do as he pleases; and his pleasure is the extermination of all Armenians who will not Islamize, the expulsion of the American missionaries, the destruction of their property, and the showing of himself as superior to all treaties and to all the claims of truth, justice, and humanity towards all men of the Christian faith.

Having now vindicated myself, as I believe, and also my associates in Turkey, from the suspicion of having done anything to sacrifice our right to the protection of our government, I would most earnestly appeal to you to use your great influence to right the wrong which our government has done us, to rescue us from impending destruction. We claim only the treaty rights of American citizens. The missionaries in the field have shown their readiness, if need be, to suffer unto death rather than forsake, in these scenes of blood and torture, the people to whom they have given their lives. Lead, we pray you, the Great Republic, to stretch out her arm for their protection. Secure from the Sultan the rights accorded to other nations, and the blessing of those who are ready to perish will descend upon you.

I remain, with profound respect and admiration, the humblest of your fellow citizens,

CYRUS HAMLIN.